

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with James E. Churchman - October 11, 1996

Q: Good morning. This is Glenmarie Brikus at the office of Mr. James Churchman, prominent funeral director in the City of Newark. Today is October 11th and it's now 11 a.m. So, Mr. Churchman, we can get started with this. And the first thing I would to ask is, give me your full name, please.

Churchman: James E. Churchman, Jr.

Q: And your date of birth?

Churchman: I was born September 1, 1924.

Q: Where were you born?

Churchman: At Newark, New Jersey, on Bundy Street.

Q: Now, your occupations. What kind of work have you done in your lifetime?

Churchman: Well, I became a licensed funeral director in 1949. And prior to that I worked as a credit investigator for the National Newark and Essex Trading Company. Worked there eleven years. Following that, once my children came into the business and started working, I worked four years for University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. And night in security. I left there and worked as a medical investigator for the Essex County Medical Examiner's Office. For twelve years, retiring from there January 1, 1994. Since then I've been semi-retired working at the funeral home with my children, my son and my daughter. See I'm assisting them.

Q: Which of these do you consider to have been your primary occupation?

Churchman: My primary occupation has been a funeral director.

Q: What is your educational background?

Churchman: I attended public schools in Newark. Mama Street School, Southside High. I attended Howard University for one year. And I went into the service from there. And then when I returned, I completed my apprenticeship with my dad and attended McAllister School of Embalming in New York, where I graduated in 1948. And took the State exams. I also attended the University of St. Louis. Took a course there for the medical investigators.

Q: How far did you go to school? What degrees did you earn?

Churchman: Was no degrees earned by me. I became a licensed funeral director. I became a certified medical investigator for the County Medical Examiner's office.

Q: Who did you marry? When and where?

Churchman: I married Edith Corinne Johnston, PATERSON New Jersey. And that was September 3, 1949.

Q: How long did you know each other before you were married?

Churchman: I met my wife in 1946 through a friend of hers who I was overseas with at Pearl Harbor.

Q: What kind of work does Mrs. Churchman do, or what kind of work has she done since you've known her?

Churchman: Well, she has her master's degree from Howard University. But since we were

married, prior to that she was a social worker. Once we were married, she became a housewife, assisted me at the funeral home.

Q: How many children do you have?

Churchman: We have two children. Our first born is our daughter, Edith C. Churchman. Who was born June 6, 1951. And my son, James E. Churchman III, was born January 9, 1954. Both were born in Newark, New Jersey.

Q: I see. What was your father's name?

Churchman: My father was James E. Churchman.

Q: And where was he born?

Churchman: My dad was born in Orange, New Jersey.

Q: And your mother's maiden name, and where was she born?

Churchman: My mother's name is Gladys E. St. John. She was born in Ansonia, Connecticut.

Q: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Churchman: No. I do not.

Q: And what was your father's occupation?

Churchman: My father was a second generation funeral director, succeeding his dad. And he retired I believe in 1974.

Q: And your mother's occupation?

Churchman: My mother was a social worker. She'd been associated with the Friendly Neighborhood for many, many years. She originally started as a volunteer. After a number of years, she became a professional worker. Started out as a with the executive and he became the director of the Friendly Neighborhood House which later became the Friendly Folks.

Q: This question I don't think would probably not apply to you, but it's here, so here goes. Have you changed your name or has any member of their family changed their name because of a religious faith or ethnicity or nationality, those kinds of things that young people do these days? You know, we're born Jim Jones and we become Mohammed something or other.

Churchman: No. I'm still James E. Churchman, Jr. And my family has maintained the Churchman name also. We're very proud. And our children are the fourth generation funeral business, carrying the name Churchman.

Q: I'm going to skip a series of these questions because they don't apply to you, like where did you first, if you migrated to Newark, where did you come from and all that kind of stuff. You told me you were born in Newark and you're a third generation funeral director. Have all of the funeral directors been located in Newark?

Churchman: No. My grandfather originally started in the business in Orange. And from that he had branches in Hackensack, Newark, Morristown, Camden, Washington, Virginia, and North Carolina. Unfortunately, he died at an early age of 43. My dad, when he became of age, he succeeded the business in Orange and then later opened in Newark. I believe it was one month after I was born. But the business had originally been carried on, the branch that was in Newark, had been continued by Mr. Beckett, who had worked for my grandfather. And he had continued the business and then later built the business up and moved across the street. The books that he had maintained he had turned over to my dad. So I presently have in my possession not only my

father's records, but I also have my grandfather's records.

Q: Okay. You know, the purpose of this endeavor I didn't mention to you. But what we're trying to do is to establish an oral history of African-Americans in the City of Newark. So there might come a time when we might be looking for documentation of social, economic and political life of, you know, our people in the City of Newark. And if we do, may I come back, and perhaps there may be something you'd want to share with us.

Churchman: Oh I'd be very happy to. But I would like to add that we do have our history recorded with the New Jersey Historical Society.

Q: Okay.

Churchman: But we'll be glad to talk to you, or any other representatives from the organization.

Q: All right. Thank you. Now did you have any relatives in the south?

Churchman: You ask a very good question. I have, my grandfather was born in Loudon County, Virginia. And I understand that there were relatives there. And I have often thought of going there to try to find out if there are any, still any of my relatives still left there. Unfortunately, my dad used to go back and forth when he was a youngster, but he stopped and he never took me and talked about it very little. We did have some relatives in Montclair that were related and may have died out.

Q: I see. So none of your relatives that you knew of migrated to Newark?

Churchman: Well, my grandfather was the one who migrated from Virginia. Originally he was in Kansas and then he ended in Orange, where he met my grandmother and they married.

Q: Did you ever live in Newark?

Churchman: Oh yes. I was born and raised here.

Q: Oh, okay. All right. Okay. Where have you lived in the City of Newark?

Churchman: Well, as I said, I was born on Bundy Street. I lived at 120 Barclay Street, 113 Barclay Street. I lived at 161 Barclay Street. I lived at 19 Rose Street. Also lived at 143 Somerset Street. I lived at 152 Somerset Street. I lived at 17 Somerset Street. I lived at 28 Barclay Street, and I also lived at 84 Barclay Street. And when I got married, I lived at 44 Barclay Street. And from there we moved to 397 Bergen Street, where after being there a year, I opened my own funeral home here in 1952. And I moved from there in 1971, I moved the business to my present location at 345 Thirteenth Avenue, where after my dad retired he had an office. My personal residence, I moved to Montclair in nineteen-sixty, 65, I think or maybe 66. And where I've resided ever since.

Q: What were those neighborhoods like when you lived in all of those places that you just mentioned? Were they ethnically mixed, or were they all one nationality or another?

Churchman: Well, in my younger years they were a, it was a mixed neighborhood. It was blacks and Jews basically. And as I got older, it became strictly a Negro area, which we now refer to as a black area. And I can remember in elementary school where at Mama Street I'd say our class must have been half, half and half, as far as color was concerned. And then when I went to high school, I guess we blacks made up about a third of Southside High. Of course, that's the same school that Judge Barry Haggard was attended, also the late Charles Williams. But the neighborhood, until I moved to Bergen Street, and then when I moved to Bergen Street, that was a well-mixed neighborhood. Of course, as the years went on there, it became less and less mixed. In fact, when I moved to my present location, the business, this was a mixed neighborhood, started changing.

Q: The teachers in the schools that you attended, were there any African-American teachers there then?

Churchman: We, at my grammar school we had two teachers of color. One was the daughter of the late Mr. Baxter, that Baxter Terrace was named after. And, of course, he was the black principal that we had in Newark.. His daughter, Mrs. Grace Fenderson, taught Mama Street School. We had one other teacher and I believe, I think her name was Borders, but she taught art. And it wasn't Pansy Borders. It was a, I think her name was Borders. But she was only there for I think two or three days a week. She rotated from, between Mama Street School and another school. When I attended Southside High, there were no black teachers there.

Q: Where did people, especially our people, shop in those days as you grew up in Newark?

Churchman: Well, as I grew up, big shopping area was Springfield Avenue which I would say between the intersection of South Orange Avenue and Springfield Avenue, up to Belmont Avenue. And those were the stores that I can remember my mother going into White's Millinery buying her hats. I used to go to Houseman's Shoe Store there for my shoes. My dad would take me. And then I would go up to Miller's clothing store which was further up on Springfield Avenue, between Prince and Charlton. And then we had an ice cream parlor there called Dellcrest, and it was a big thing on a Sunday after church, cause we didn't go to movies on Sunday, that we would walk over to Dellcrest Ice Cream Parlor and sit down and eat ice cream there. It was quite a treat for us to go over there. And it was very really disheartening to see Springfield Avenue, the shopping stores destroyed as a result of the riots that we had in the 60s. Really the demise of Springfield Avenue.

Q: How were people of color treated in those department stores or those stores?

Churchman: Well, in those stores, naturally, we were treated very well because we were the predominant shoppers here. When we went downtown to Bambergers or Hanes or Kresge's, we

were not. We used to dress up to go downtown. And I do not remember any outstanding slights, though I do know that as a youngster when I was coming along, many of the restaurants downtown you were not welcome in. It was rumored that if you did go in there, they would break the dishes up after you ate. And, of course, we stood upstairs in the movies. I can remember that too.

Q: Were there any people of color who owned businesses in?

Churchman: Well, I think basically [interruption].

Q: I was asking about the ethnicity of store owners.

Churchman: Yes. Basically, the only stores that I can remember that we owned were like the tailor shops, the beauty parlors, the barbershops, the funeral homes. Other than that, we had a few small stores that sold food. I can remember Mrs. Ferguson on Barclay Street. But it was very other stores, clothing stores or anything like that. May have had a couple of confectionery stores I can remember. But the professional men that were in the neighborhood like Dr. Buckner, he was a medical doctor. And Dr. Andrew D. Morris, he was a dentist. They were really quite helpful to anyone who was trying to get established in business, and really bent over backwards to do what they could. Doctor there that, there was another doctor on West Kenney Street. And I'm trying to remember his name. Dr. Darden was also another one who was quite helpful and offered quite a bit of encouragement to anyone who was trying to go into.

Q: Those persons who owned the businesses in the community, did they hire black folk?

Churchman: The black people?

Q: No, the white folk.



Churchman: You mean the white. Well, usually you had some kind of token representation. I can remember when Bam's first started hiring blacks other than doormen and elevator operators. And I used to walk through Bam's with a great deal of pride to be able to see one of us working there in a sales capacity.

Q: Were you able to get credit at those local stores? Or were our people able to get credit there?

Churchman: In the neighborhoods they were able to get credit. Downtown I really, after I got married, which was in 49, it wasn't any problem getting credit for myself at the time. There may have been a lower cap for me than others. I think the, some of the banks downtown didn't look too kindly on us. We made out much better at neighborhood banks.

Q: What do you remember as the relationship between adults and younger people, teenagers and younger?

Churchman: Well, I think it was a good relationship between the teenager, the young people, and the adults. Of course, if you did anything wrong out on the street, they could reprimand you and by the time you got home, they knew about it and you were reprimanded again. But it was, I thought a good deal of healthy respect the young people had for the adults. And it was really well representative. It's kind of disconcerting to see what's going on in these days.

Q: Tell me about the quality of education in the schools in the City of Newark as you grew up.

Churchman: Well, I think quality was somewhat fair. But I could see it that it was not handed out with a great deal of justice. I felt and many of the students that I came along with got much more involved than I did. But because they did not have somebody behind them that could speak up properly, they were steered into maybe civic courses in high school, where they probably might have qualified for something better. But I think the level of acceptance continued to drop as I became older. And I did have the interest of both of my parents while I was attending school.

And a lot of things sort of fell into me that I felt that did not happen to some of the other students. I was really upset when I was maybe in my last year in elementary school where the youngsters who were taking IQ exams and so forth, where many had pretty decent IQs, and they still were not allowed to take any other course other than a civic course or a general course, which really would not gain people anywhere. Of course, at one time they used to try to steer all of us into vocational schools. But I did not run into that much. But I just felt probably many of the, I won't say many, but a good percentage of parents were really interested in the child's activities. But sometimes they were more interested in making sure that they were polite and courteous in school. And where probably the emphasis should have been placed on more on what they were getting. But I think it was a matter of just making sure that everyone behaved properly. But I know in high school I felt that probably many of the teachers were not excited about trying to help you.

I can remember attending, they used to have school concerts at the School Stadium. And I used to go because, I don't play any musical instrument, but I have a great appreciation for music. And my grandmother and I used to go. And I had an English teacher who, I guess this was either my first or second year at Southside, and she saw me at School Stadium at this concert. Miss Smith. And she was so impressed at seeing me there that the rest of the time that I was at Southside she was, you know, bent over backwards to just trying to help me and do whatever she could to further my course. But I was very fortunate I think in most of the teachers I had.

In grammar school I had a gym teacher by the name of [?], and ironically my son had him when he was attending school at Maple Avenue. It was quite a twist at the time. But I think that unfortunately the PTA or the Home School Associations were not as strong as they could have been. And even when I was attending as a parent when our children were in school, we ran into problems with a sort of a closed association with us standing on the outside. I know I've had some, I had some rather heated discussions and people going to expel my children from school and so forth. But we had, then later I had an experience with my daughter, where one of our own was an advisor and she was harder on my daughter than anybody else in the school. And it just so happened that the woman and I had taught me Latin, had become the head counselor for the Newark Board of Education. And I was able to get ahold of her cause she was close, and she was able to rectify some of the things for my daughter.

Q: Usually we think about the attitudes of people, of parents particularly, when they sent us to school. But, you know, until recent years we trusted schools to educate our children. And we talk about the parent putting emphasis on children being well behaved in schools. That was because our parents trusted the schools to educate children in those days. But now parents if they don't race in, we get nothing now as it is, and if they don't race in, you get even less.

Churchman: Well, you know, the ironical thing, and I mention my daughter. She went to a school out in Ohio. I would loved for her to go to Howard. But at that time it was so much unrest going on, I felt she would made out better where she did go. And she ran into some experiences there where people were trying to discourage her. She did get her master's degree. She went on to Emerson in Boston for her master's degree. And then later went out to Bowling Green and got her Ph.D. in communications. So it means that, I think we, as parents, it is a responsibility to encourage and to really stick behind our children.

Q: Right. Right. When did you first notice the use of intoxicants and other substances like drugs and alcohol, etc? When did you first notice that to become a problem with young people?

Churchman: Well, I would say I noticed alcohol while I was, I must have been eleven, twelve, thirteen years old, in the park that I was living in the Harrison-Douglas. There was a lot going on in the park. A lot good and some bad. One of the good things was the tennis started out being in the park there. All of slowly were tennis experts. But as far as

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Q: The City of Newark, were they readily admitted to hospitals, and were there always doctors available where we got the kind of medical attention we needed?

Churchman: Well, I don't. As far as medical attention is concerned, it was really touch and go Cause many of the, most of the black doctors was not accepted on the staffs of the hospitals. It

was not only Newark, but I guess it was every place in the county. And as a result, many of the doctors had to do some operations, I can remember a young man that I was in the Boy Scouts with who had a tonsillectomy in the doctor's office. And it was Dr. Buckner over on First and Bloomfield Avenue, and he apparently thought everything was all right. Sent the young man home. And Archie died. But this was, I know when my daughter born Dr. Buckner delivered her. And that was in 1951, and he had to get special privileges to be able to deliver her at Presbyterian Hospital. So it meant that the doctors in the neighborhoods, our black doctors, did a lot in the offices under very tough conditions. Where if they had been admitted to the hospitals where it could have been done under much better circumstances. I think it just proves the mettle of the type of men that we had that were treating us that were interested in us and did the very best that they could. And I'm sure they did better maybe than some people could have done even if they had the facilities of the hospitals. And then, for instance, when we did start getting into the hospitals, we had one hospital here that was owned by Dr. Kenney. Which was the Kenney Hospital, and then later it became the Community Hospital. But that was a black owned and operated hospital, and that was on Kenney Street between Quitman and Hyde. And ironically, directly across at the corner of Hyde and Kenney used to be the old Beth Israel Hospital. But here you had two hospitals, with less than a block apart. But one was considered white; one was considered black. And Dr. Kenney was there. He did a lot there to try alleviate some of the conditions. Later we had a Doctor's Hospital open on Avon Avenue where finally people were admitted. But I can remember when the Beth Israel opened over on Lyons Avenue, anytime a black patient over there, they were automatically put on the basement floor. And anybody had a room upstairs, they were really doing something. [Laughter]

Q: How long ago was that? Do you remember what year, how long ago was it that the black hospital closed in Newark?

Churchman: Oh, I. Rose Morrow Stewart was quite a worker there at that hospital before it closed. And I would say that was late 50s or early 60s. We have one woman here, Mrs. Cybil Moses, who married to Edison Moses. And she lives in the Clinton Hill area. And she came here

from Tuscaloosa, Mississippi I believe. But she worked here as an x-ray technician. And later when they closed, I believe she went to [?] Hospital, which later became Washington, then University Hospital. And she would doubtless know the dates. Because I know she had worked there a number of years. She came here about 1946, 45.

Q: Does she still live in Newark?

Churchman: She still lives in Newark.

Q: What about juvenile crime, juvenile delinquency? When do you remember that first becoming prevalent among our people in Newark?

Churchman: Well, some young people have always had an ability to get in trouble in certain sections. But I didn't see it really becoming an outstanding problem, I guess, until the 60s. Of course, unfortunately, I think that the Newark riots kicked off a lot. But there was unrest before that. And I think some of the problem stems from the high rise public housing. Where you, for instance, residents of Hayes Homes. You took an area there that probably had about six hundred families and turn around and they have over with those apartments, over twenty-one hundred families. And it just puts a lot of stress and strain. And I think the comparison between the [?] and the Baxter Terrace public housing which we put up in the late 30s, look much better than the high rise that has been up in the 50s. So I think it's a good example where you just can't have people piled on top of each other without adequate programs. And to my of thinking, this has been a failure of Newark because they put people in there, they don't do anything to try to train them or enforce any type of living. And ironically, Reverend Hayes Home, they put that up and then they turned around and they tore that down, Belmont Avenue School. So the Cruise could put up an office. Then they had to turn around and build another West Kenney Street School which was overcrowded before it even opened. But I happen to know that particular situation there because my business was there at 397 Bergen Street. Which was just a couple of blocks from Hayes Home.

Q: What was your perception of people of color helping each other during those years?

Churchman: Well, I think they would do everything they could to try to help. I think it was, in my early years, it was a certain amount of pride where blacks would look at anybody that had appear to be succeeding, and I think it was just greatly appreciated what people were able to do to try to put something back in the community.

Q: In general what were race relations like between blacks and whites in the area?

Churchman: Well, I think, as I look back, some of the youngsters that I had come along with in high school and grammar school, it was, as you got older, and frequently got around to dating age, everybody seemed to go their own individual way. Very, very seldom was blacks respected for their intellect. They were looked up to for their athletic ability. But as far as general acceptance, I don't think it was that great. And I know when I started grammar school, young Jewish family lived next door to us, we used to play in and out of each other's homes. When we got older, we just drifted apart. And it could well be the different societies that he was involved in. As a youngster, eleven and a half, I became involved in the Boy Scouts movement, which I was active in. And was fortunate enough to obtain the rank of Eagle. But there we started, it had to be a black troop. And they had Sea Scouts. And I never will forget, I went down to, they had a Sea Scout unit at the Jewish temple there on Waverly Avenue and High Street. They had Cubs, Boy Scouts and Sea Scouts, but I was interested in going to Sea Scouts. And beaus of my color, I wasn't able to join. But I think probably by having our own, we were able to do much more. But the thing with the scouting, of course, is you needed the support of adults as far as leadership and what not. And that was always a very difficult point in the scouting here in the Newark area.

Q: We talked earlier about the kind of work that you did before you became an established funeral director. What were the working conditions like in those jobs that you had?

Churchman: Well, when I started with the bank as an investigator, we had, let's see, about twenty,

twenty-one fellows working in the same capacity. And we ended up, I think we had a total of four working that department. I think it's only one other man still living, that's Raymond Livingston. He presently lives in Montclair. He was born and raised I believe in Newark. And his mother was, many people knew, her name was Eleanor [?], worked with the bank also. But we were hired basically to work in the areas where the other people were fearful of entering, and I first started but then later because of being successful in doing what I was told to do, I was just relegated to the Central Ward which at that time was the old Third Ward in Newark. And I later worked in Union County and I worked in Bergen County which is the longest of any area that I worked in the eleven years I was there. I worked Bergen County, went upstate New York, and New York City, Long Island.

Q: You say twenty-one fellows. That mean twenty-one fellows of color?

Churchman: No. No. Of the twenty-one, it was only four of us that were colored. And I think at any one time there was only three of us working there. But, cause one gentleman left and they didn't hire another.

Q: How well did those jobs pay you guys in those days?

Churchman: Well, it's very interesting that you should say that. When I went down, and I think basically I was hired because I was an Episcopalian. Because that was the strength of the bank at the time. But they wanted college background, and I was hired, and I think I was hired at thirty-five dollars a week. Nineteen, let's see, it must have been 48. And I later found out that if they hired someone white a week ahead of me, and he hadn't finished high school and he was getting thirty-eight dollars a week. [Laughter]

Q: A whole big three dollars difference.

Churchman: Yeah. So I went in and raised all kind of ruckus. And they said, we'll get that

rectified. But I worked seven years with the bank while I was still maintaining my business. They knew it. And, in fact, when I went in and told them what I was doing when I found out that I wasn't gonna be probably be elevated in the banking business. I got my raises, and I think ironically after eleven years, they offered me a job as a bank teller. But for seven years I worked at the bank, and I operated funerals with my wife. So it really gave me a steady hand while I was becoming established on my own. But the pay kept going up so, you know, we got increments every six months. And finally, it's possible, I don't think they looked upon me and the other men as just people of color working there. We, you know, we did a job, and in time sales you got a certain percentage of writing every month. So that's, there's a few of us.

Q: So were the men of color treated differently by the supervisors than the white guys?

Churchman: No. I don't think so. I had one or two whites come to tell me that I should slow down. I was making them look bad. But I didn't pay that much attention. But the main thing, I think, was producing. And your work sort of spoke for itself.

Q: Now you said you were working as an investigator. Precisely what was the duties of an investigator?

Churchman: Well, it was, we were given delinquent accounts, and it was our job to find out why they were delinquent. Many times people had service complaints. I can remember going out to Potters Crossing, which is out in the Rahway area, where we had sort of a good black settlement out there. I went out to find out why this gentleman was not paying on his fees on a television. And I finally got the man's house, and it was still sitting on his front porch. And the reason he wasn't paying for it was he didn't have any electricity so he wasn't using it. But this is the type of thing that some of the salesmen that were going around knocking on doors would do. But we would try to rectify some of the investitures and it was also my job locate people that had moved, which we referred to as skipped. So it was, it was, I found it very interesting. And, of course, I was involved in collections. I was also involved in repossessions. Also auction sales of items that



had been repossessed.

Q: Were you ever unemployed? Did you have problems finding work to do?

Churchman: No. No. I've been employed ever since I used to sell Liberty magazines. I think anybody that really wants to work can find something. They may not make the money they want to make, but.

Q: Now what were the common occupations for black men and women in Newark then? The common occupations.

Churchman: Well, unfortunately it was mostly labor, labor and domestics.

Q: Do you have any maybe paystubs or records of documentation of any kind that related to the work that you did that you still have?

Churchman: No, unfortunately, I think I chucked all that. In the seventy-two years I'm here, I had quite an accumulation of paystubs and what not. But I don't think I have very little of that. I'll check, but I doubt it.

Q: What church do you belong to Mr. Churchman?

Churchman: Well, I was sort of born and raised at the St. Philip's Episcopal Church. It was on High Street diagonally across from Central High School. And while I was in the service, the church merged with another Episcopal Church which was on the corner of Market and Hyde. They still maintain the name of St. Philip's. And when I came back from service, I continued my membership there, and I was married in the Episcopal Church in Paterson. And after I brought my bride to Newark and we started church at St. Philip's beginning there. And then in 1966, I think it was, maybe 65 we had a fire there at the church at Hyde and Market. The church burnt

down. It had nothing to do with the riots. But the church burned down, and we met in our parish house for about a year. And then we merged with Trinity Cathedral which was on Broad Street, approximately 610 Broad, which was opposite Hanes Department Store. Bishop Storks, who was the bishop for the Newark Diocese, was quite interested in seeing that we merged with Trinity. And fortunately I was on the committee that negotiated with the committee from Trinity. We finally did merge, and we continued there at the Cathedral. I've been active on the vestry, I've been a board member there. I'm very happy to say that my son is a vestryman there now.

Q: Are you still active in the church?

Churchman: Yes I am. And my wife is very happy that we go there. And there's very few Sundays we miss not being there.

Q: When did you begin to be active in the church?

Churchman: Well, I guess I've always been active in the church. I started out in church school. I was an accolade at the old St. Philip's. And I continued to serve. In fact, I became when I came back from the service, I became active as a vespyrman. I was one of the youngest men to have served in that capacity. And also had become the Sunday School superintendent.

Q: Who were the outstanding ministers of your church during the years that you've been there?

Churchman: Well, Father Berry was our minister there when I was born. And I guess Father Berry retired I think about 1964, 65. He was later made a canon emeritus of Trinity. And ironically Trinity later changed its name. It didn't change it, but it added. It became Trinity, St. Philip's Cathedral. That took place, I guess, about three or four years ago. But following, Dean Canon Berry's retirement, when we had interim clergy, but our next minister was Dean Ludley Lockland. And he was succeeded by Canon Dillard Robinson, who became the Dean succeeding Ludley Lockland. And Dean Robinson retired, oh, it must have been about 87 or 88. And it

might have been later than that. Our next, we had interim ministers, and our next dean was a Dean Arturo Subuni, who is presently serving as our Dean and doing a very nice job of it. I really was not exposed to many different ministers.

Q: What do you consider to be the church's major accomplishments?

Churchman: Well, on the twenty-sixth, Trinity, St. Philip's Cathedral will be celebrating its 250th anniversary. I think that one of the accomplishments is I've always been very proud of is the merger that took place with Trinity Cathedral. I think it was maintained with a great deal of integrity. We haven't necessarily always agreed with our bishop, but we stayed there and we can't see anything other. The church to me has always stood for a great deal. And we've had some very good people active in our church. I mentioned Mrs. Fennison who taught at Mama Street School. She was very active in the church. I mentioned the Kenton. It was George Kenton and his two sisters who were very active in the church. At that time we had an outstanding church school. Percy Conrad who was very active in the church, very active with the Newark Post Office. We've had, as a youngster I can remember they used to give annual boat rides up the Hudson to Bear Mountain. I think Bethany Baptist was another church who used to do the same thing. But then they stopped, and finally we did start the church rides again in, I guess about eight or nine years ago. Started to do the boat rides again. I think the thing that I'm very keen about our church is that it's just been, over the years, it's been one good family. And many of the people we do not see, I guess, unless it's going to Sunday at church. And it was one of the reasons that we make sure we do go. But just a good strong feeling. And I wouldn't say that we've been able to maintain everybody. But the people have left and gone to other churches, we're still friendly with them. They still come back from time to time.

But Father Berry who was here for quite a number of years, and I might say that even the church's position as far as elevating people to bishops and what not was practically nil as far as blacks were concerned. I keep saying he would have been a candidate for being bishop but he was just born too soon. Fortunately now, we have broken the lines. Have not only black male bishops, but we have a black female. [Laughter] But I'm very proud of my church and very

proud of my religion. I think that they've done a lot from the church where we were.

Ironically, when we got ready to merge with Trinity, some of the families that could remember the history where the blacks used to meet at Trinity and they were asked to sit upstairs. And then when they got to be so many, I think they finally went on Foster Street and somebody gave them a piece of land to build a church up on High Street. It's the church I remember. It was the church I believe my mother was married. But we had good history. And I think that though some of the people are a little hesitant about returning back the way we were put out, I think the assets that the Cathedral has were too great to turn our backs on.

Q: What was, how large was the membership when you first went there and how large is it today?

Churchman: Well, when we first went there, maybe the Cathedral had on their rolls maybe about a hundred people, maybe a hundred fifty. And, of course, like most things, the numbers that you have on the rolls not necessarily the ones that come out. And I would say probably coming out they must have had maybe about thirty-five, fifty people there. And I'm being very optimistic when I say that. But the organist there, which was Mr. Clifford Welch, who has since expired. He lived in Irvington. And our organ is at the rear of the church. When we joined, and at the time our membership numbers I think were over four hundred. And then when we merged, he was so happy to see people sitting there in the congregation that he was forever thankful for the merger. But many of the people that were the old standbys there, they continued to come to church. Many, the only reason they're not there is that they went on to their reward in heaven. But it was many of the staunch supporters, they worked well with us, and I must hasten to add that many of the ones that did pass.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

Q: And the membership now is?

Churchman: I would say the membership now is, must be about three hundred, three fifty.

Q: How much have you participated in social and cultural activities in Newark? And what social and cultural clubs, organizations do you belong to or have you belonged to?

Churchman: Well, members of Newark Frontiers Club which is a service organization. I had maintained a membership at an adult scouting. I'm a member of Prince Hall Masonry. I'm a member of the Trinity Lodge No. 33, which meets down on Belmont Avenue. Pardon me for using the old terms of the street, but I still refer to them much more readily as High and Belmont, Waverly. I don't, offhand, I would maybe have to refer to some other papers. Really I'm trying to, at this age it's time for me to start slowing down and stepping out of the organizations. Presently, I am president of Garden State Funeral Directors Association and also the Mortuary Fraternity of New Jersey.

Q: Have you participated in any political activities in Newark?

Churchman: Yes, I did. 1965 I ran for the State Senate on the Republican ticket. Unfortunately, I was not successful. But it was an enjoyable experience which at the time I decided to run, I thought I knew Newark and I knew Newark politics and state politics. But after being involved in the campaign, I became well aware of how little I really knew. And I think that it should be the duty of everyone to become politically involved one way or the other. I don't say you should make it a life's work out of it, but I think you should understand what's going on and the importance of being able to vote.

Q: What kind of changes have you noticed and what do you think about this, the political climate in Newark from the time that we had white administrators like the mayor and all of the city council people being white, and the transition to black administration? What kind of changes do you notice?

Churchman: Well, personally I think that our present situation has been involved with a witch hunt which has been established nationally as far as black leaders are concerned on the political scene. A lot of things that went on in Newark politically years ago when they used to stuff the ballot box. And I can remember seeing people almost turning their clothes inside out and voting for dead people. [Laughter] And all that stuff. A lot of the trickery and things that had been put on the doorstep of our present political leaders is not, I feel, is not fair. And saying that this is what they're doing. Because things have been going on in the political scene for many, many years since I was a babe in arms and I used to hear things that were going on. So it's not an exception. But it just appears to me that, of course some people would say that we just can't get away with the same things that other people that had been in office could. But I personally think that there is a witch hunt. And this was following an article I read in Gentleman's Quarterly, I guess, about three years ago, which had pointed out some of the phases that been across the country. Where time after time they tried to discredit black political leaders. I think that the thing that bothers me is that the people that represent us should have some income other than just a political office. I realize that this cannot be put into as a prerequisite because then any and everybody should be able to run. I think I had hoped we would be a little better able to select our candidates. And I know this was the plan not too many years ago, and I imagine that the black political group doesn't seem to be causing. So I was very interested in reading where they interviewed both the Republican and Democratic Senatorial candidates the other day. And I believe Reverend Reginald Jackson's remark which I thought said it all that Democrats shouldn't consider that they have us in the bag and the Republicans shouldn't write off. So I think it meant a lot. But I think we really need to have good and sincere candidates, and we can't run on what people did in the past. We need to really enrich our educational system to try to do the very best that we can for our children, which is really out future.

Q: The first mayor of color was elected in 1970, I believe, Ken Gibson was elected mayor. And before he was elected mayor I believe we had, what, two councilpersons, councilmen, black councilmen, Irving Turner.

Churchman: Well, Irving Turner was the first man. I must say he was successful after many attempts. Of course, I think he went in. We still had the mayor and commissioner form of government. Who do you have as the second?

Q: I don't remember what his name was, but I think there was a second black man that was a councilman. Before Irving Turner I think. I don't remember what his name was.

Churchman: No. I think Turner was the first.

Q: Turner was the first. And I don't remember who the other was. But what kind of differences do you see since we, after we elected the first mayor of color, and the City Council progressively became predominantly black. I think we have like, what about six black folk on there now. Three non blacks, two whites and an Hispanic now.

Churchman: Well, getting back to Ken Gibson. When Ken was successful, and I have nothing but the utmost respect for Ken. I think he's extremely sincere. And done a terrific job under somewhat adverse circumstances. But I was really tickled after he was elected, the New York Daily News came out with Ken's picture on, and the headline was that "Black Engineer Elected". And, of course, my question, of course, there's something wrong with me. But I want to know what a black engineer is. And that was never answered. But so much for that. I think that I've been very happy to see blacks become interested in running for office. I just become extremely upset with the amount of money it costs to be elected as a candidate. And, of course, we as a group, we know very little about giving, and so, as a result, the powers that want to control things, they give money to everybody so whoever wins they have backed a winner.

Q: How have the economic status of black folk changed in Newark since we have elected black officials?

Churchman: Well, I think it's had to change with the mere sight my walking in City Hall and

looking around and seeing who's working there has changed. I don't know how much, but, of course, the economic situation for blacks has changed across the board. I think the fact that we now have CPAs and doctors that are specializing in different fields. Where we have nurses working as supervisors, head nurses in the different hospitals, technicians. Really been terrific. I think that maybe we may make a mistake where we think that because we have black officials that blacks that are the only ones that are going to make money city. Which, of course, we expect the City to be run right and correctly and kind of take it easy on the taxpayers.

Q: What about community participation? What kind of activities have you participated in in the community?

Churchman: I think you asked me that question before.

Q: No. I asked you about the church and politics and social and cultural activities.

Churchman: You want to repeat that question again?

Q: What kind of community activities have you participated in? Such as the schools and other community organizations and community activities like organizations, etc. You know, and what kind of things have you done?

Churchman: Well, I was active naturally in the school system. PTAs and Home School Association. I helped form a block association here on South Seventh Street. I tried to help young people who were in college or coming out of college or coming out of high school who were interested in, it's not necessarily the funeral business, but any business. Try to advise them as to what schools they should go to, courses. Try to act as a, anytime they can call here at the funeral home, to go out to career days, of course, at different schools.

Q: Were there any black news media, when did black news media such as radio and newspapers,



etc., become available in Newark?

Churchman: Well, we had, I can remember the black, two black papers. And the Afro-American and then we had the Newark Herald News which was active here. Of course, we had the Newark Evening News which I had a fellow that I was overseas with in the Marine Corps, Luther Jackson, served as a reporter for the Newark News, and I think he was the first black reporter they had. But sorry to say that the Herald bit the dust and try to find Afro around here it's rather difficult. And my daughter does get the Amsterdam News from New York whenever she can. But I think, I personally subscribe to a weekly from Brooklyn, the New Age, which does carry some news that we could not find otherwise in the other publications that are available in this area.

Q: What about black radio? Were there black entertainment on the radio? Were there black commentators? And have there ever been a black owned radio station?

Churchman: No to my knowledge. We, of course, the only black was, you know, we used to hear the black music a lot. Like jazz and so forth. But as far as, we listened to the black station that's owned by the gentleman from New York, WLB.

Q: WLB, or WLBI.

Churchman: I listen to those with a great deal of enjoyment that knowing that they were black owned. But this is something that just has come about in recent years. Before we had very little control over the radio, and, of course, even at the present we have very little control over the television.

Q: I can remember when WNJR used to have black announcers. Black, what do you call them, not DJs but commentators.

Churchman: Yeah. I think the last owner of that was another fellow I was in the service with.

Kitty Taylor used to do quite a bit of work with them. But before they became black owned, they used to have quite a few religious programs on that band. But I was sorry to see that they had, that we lost ownership of that.

Q: I don't need to ask you all these questions.

Churchman: That was, Daniel Robinson was, I think, the last owner of WNJR.

Q: This question asks did all classes of African-Americans live close to you? If so, how did they get along with each other?

Churchman: As a youngster, or?

Q: Yeah. As far back as you can remember.

Churchman: Yeah. Well, most of us did live close together because there were certain boundaries that we lived within. The area that I basically lived in was from Avon Avenue over to Springfield and then from High to Belmont Avenue. And there was a great deal of interest. If I went down to Sherman Avenue, I felt that I had taken a trip. Even though I had been born on Bundy Street. But those were sort of the unofficial boundaries and I can remember if I went beyond that, I really thought I was stepping out by going over to the Bethany Baptist Church on West Market Street. There was a black florist over there called Gloria Florists run by Ross Emunds. And that was the first black florist we had in the City to my knowledge. But that was, I can remember going over there, getting my little corsages for the young lady that I was taking to semi-formals and so forth. But that was considered quite a trip over there. And then, of course, we had a black druggist over there. There was one up at the corner of North Fork and South Orange Avenue. There was another on the corner of Newark and West Market.

Q: How did those people get along in the neighborhoods, Mr. Churchman? Was there an

interchange of communication among the people regardless to their economic status or their educational background?

Churchman: I think they did. Yeah. I was kind of fortunate, I think, in living in the parish in Douglas. Of course, they claim, I don't know how true it was, that. Well, I know it is true that they try to screen the people that came in. Reverend Career was the manager. And they tried to, they did a nice job of screening people coming in. So it meant that everybody got along very well. In fact, I can remember as a youngster, I guess I must have been about twelve or thirteen, we had a circulating library. Scott Young from Bloomfield had this library, and I used to deliver books. And I used to go all through the apartments delivering books. And many of the people that I delivered books to I remember very well. In fact, Judge Yancey's wife, I used to take books to her. A number of people in the apartments. Cause I had this little case I used to carry. I used to, I don't know whether that triggered me into being an avid reader or not, but it was really, you know, well received. I got to know all the people. I got to learn my shortcuts across the top, on the roofs of the apartments, where all the clotheslines were and so forth.

Q: Interesting. Other than white store owners and other whites with vested interests, economic interests in the community, do you recall any other whites having an interest in the black community?

Churchman: Yes. I noticed there was a Mrs. Sugard and Mrs. Ellingsworth who was very active at the Friendly Neighborhood House in a volunteer capacity. In fact, I think it was, I'm not sure which of the Bamberger brothers it was, but one of the Bambergers was very active also in the, as far as donating land, I think, to build a neighborhood center which ended up at Morton and Howard Streets. They had, but usually the whites that were interested were ones that had grocery stores, meat market. I remember the names. I called to hear my mother speaker of. The only ones that I recall were people who actually owned stores or something.

Q: You mentioned the major shopping area in Newark was on Springfield Avenue. Did you, did our people shop downtown at that time and what were the major stores there?

Churchman: Yeah, we would go down. We'd go to Bam's, Kresge's and Hanes. And those were, and, of course, there was Ohrbach's there. We were very fortunate downtown, and I say this as a Newarker, we were very fortunate in having all these stores that opened all on Halsey Street. And at one time, there were some plans afoot to open an arcade on Halsey Street so that people would be able to walk without the fear of traffic. But that never came to a reality. At that time, it was just prior to all the malls opening, Willowbrook and so forth. And I think that that had a lot to do with it.

Q: What incidents involving racial discrimination in Newark have you experienced or know of?

Churchman: Well, as I mentioned previously, I knew that at one time the restaurants would not want you in. Particularly at Child's Restaurant. I think they had two or three. And then there was just certain areas you were allowed to sit in. For instance, down at Novelty Park they had a private restaurant, the fact that you weren't welcome in. They had other eateries, like Grant, and a couple of those on Market Street, on either side of Broad Street, that the people could go in and eat. But it was not really a first-class restaurant. It was sort of a, you could either eat standing or sitting. One of those things. But as far as, as I said, the movies and theaters were segregated. And I can remember going to the Rialto Theater. I went there because they didn't have a balcony.

[Laughter]

Q: And you didn't have to sit in the back. What about black folk in the police department and in the fire department?

Churchman: Well, I think the first gentleman that went on the fire department of color was a fellow by the name of Thomas. He came back from the Korean War and started serving. But as far as the police department was concerned, of course, the Brents, and C. B. Norris, they were in

my mind some of the first blacks that were on the police department. Both of those gentlemen made outstanding records in the police department. And I think Jimmy Pigpens was involved. The police department made outstanding names and records for themselves. But I can remember, I guess it must have been 47, 48, when they really first started admitting blacks to the police departments. And at that time, they wouldn't integrate the radio cars. And that was something that came about much later. I had a couple of friends that went on at that time. Norman Green, Ewing Val. They had a number of good men that served the police department. And many times they had to walk beats by themselves. C. B. Norris used to tell quite a number of tales of things that had happened to him. Cause they had started him out walking the beat in an Italian neighborhood. [Laughter] But he was, he was quite a guy. And, of course, the Pigpen and I knew Brent. But they carried themselves with a great deal of honor. And even, well, the fire department has finally cracked. I had a young man that come up behind me in scouting by the name of Richard Sweetman. He lived on Belmont Avenue, near Waverly Avenue, which was right across the street for us. Fire house there. Richard always wanted to be a fireman. And he went to school, did very well. And he took the exam to become a fireman. And he asked for this firehouse across the street from where he used to live. And the ironical part about it, they put him there, but they wouldn't let him sleep there. Well, Richard continued with this, and finally he became a captain of that same firehouse. Cause I think the chief had retired. I thought that was a very good story. [Laughter]

Q: What do you remember about quote, the Mayor of Springfield Avenue, unquote?

Churchman: The Mayor of Springfield Avenue?

Q: Yeah. I don't understand that question and I haven't anybody who knew who the Mayor of Springfield Avenue was.

Churchman: Well, I've heard the expression. But exactly who they would consider the Mayor of Springfield Avenue is kind of hard for me to understand. There was, and I don't remember the

name, because I didn't go in and out of taverns, so, but there was a tavern on Springfield Avenue where the man was rather successful. And I don't, it may have been referring to him as the Mayor of Springfield Avenue. But I don't, as a youngster, I don't recall anybody with that designation.

Q: Well, what do you remember regarding such local personalities as William Ashby, Meyer Ellingstein, Prosper Brewer and Irving Turner?

Churchman: Well, I remember Mr. Ashby, of course, very well. He has always been an outstanding individual. Of course, he was with the Urban League. But he always stood for a lot in any community, not necessarily the black community, but in all communities. Really a first-class straight shooter. Ellingstein, I think they used to call him Doc. I remember his being mayor, and I also remember him being re-elected after quite a political campaign that had quite a bit of controversy involved. But it seemed to me, it was always a continuous war.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

Q: We were talking about Mayor Ellingstein.

Churchman: Well, the last time he was elected, there was quite a battle going on between Jewish people and the Italians. And, of course, as usual we were on the periphery. But I think he was running against Delanti who was trying to be re-elected. And one of the things that happened, I think he won by five or six thousand votes. And unknown to the powers that be, it was another name, and I think it was a woman's name was put on the ballot of Delanti. And she drew about eight or nine thousand votes, which was the difference in Doc Ellingstein being elected. Talking about what was going on in politic scenes that was a good example of some of the trickery involved. As far as, you mentioned, Irving Turner I remember him running continuously, and, of course, those of us who knew Irving Turner knew he was quite vocal. I don't think we all agreed with him all the time. But he was very vocal. And I think he had run at least two or three times before he was finally elected. But he never had to worry about him sounding off, cause when he

was elected, everybody knew it, and anytime you wanted people to jump, all you had to do was mention his name. Now you had mentioned?

Q: Prosper Brewer.

Churchman: Prosper Brewer. Now Prosper was a, the Brewers was an old Newark family. Prosper was very active in politics and he was a Republican. He also lived in Harrison Douglas Apartments. And Prosper was always one that you could rely upon. I think of Prosper when I think of politics. And, of course, he was replaced as the Third Ward Republican Chairman by Bill Stubbs, who also carried himself in a good manner. But it was two different personalities. And I think I have to take my hat off to Prosper Brewer because at the time that he was fighting, he was really by himself. And he was outspoken, and he didn't mind saying what was on his mind. And I had a lot of respect for him. He was sort of a self-made man. If he told you something, you could bet your bottom dollar on it.

Q: We talked about black hospitals. What about hotels and banks? Were there any of them, and if so, where were they located?

Churchman: We had one black hotel for years. That was the Grand Hotel which was run by Bo Dereks who was a very good friend of my dad's. I think that one of the things that put that hotel on the map was the black baseball team, the Newark Eagles. Because they used to stay at that hotel. Of course, the Eagles were owned by Mr. and Mrs. Manley who lived on Crosby Street in Newark. And the Eagles used to play down at Ruppert Stadium. And I guess that hotel must have been, had to start in the 30s. And then later there was a hotel started, the Rio Grande, I believe on, I think it was on West Market Street, West Market and Central Avenue, but that didn't stay in business too long. The young man that owned that, I think, he eventually opened an ice cream parlor down on High Street, which was right next to the Howard Alumni Club that was on High Street. But the, it wasn't any, I think it was a forerunner of a black bank, but not in my time. It might have been a little before my time. The next, the first black bank that opened was under the

leadership of one of the Tucker brothers. Maybe Sam. And they started the Platoon Savings, Saving and Loan. That was on Court, Belmont Avenue. And that I think later, later bit the dust. But I think in my time that was the first banking institution that started. Mr. Tucker was quite outspoken. They had the Tucker Brothers Insurance Agency which, I think, originally started on West Street in Newark, between Montgomery and Kenney Streets. And then they later moved to Orchard Street. But Mr. Tucker himself, he was quite a bridge player. But he started, he started the bank, and he was one of the guys that was sort of behind the scenes politically. He had some connections so he was able to start it. But unfortunately, that bank did not continue. It was finally I think taken over by Howard Savings Bank. But, then of course, later under the leadership of Charles Williams, and I think it was City National opened. And that's about it as far as banks are concerned.

Q: There was another black hotel, though, wasn't there? Coleman Brothers?

Churchman: Oh yes, yes. On Court Street. That was the Coleman Brothers Quartet. They used to sing. And Coleman had a business on West Street too in Newark. And then they opened a hotel down there on Court Street near Washington Street. I didn't know too much about that hotel, but I remember the Tucker brothers. Two or three of those brothers became ministers, and one is still alive. He's at 516 Bergen Street, Reverend Coleman.

Q: Oh, one of the Colemans live at 516? Oh, I see

Churchman: Yes. That's, in fact, I think that's the only surviving brother. But it was three of them that were ministers. One was, had a church up in Morristown. And there was two had churches here in Newark. The last church, the one that I know, is over here at 516. Had a church at 17th and Avon Avenue, Reverend Buckner's old church.

Q: Do they still, do the Colemans still own the barbecue chain?



Churchman: I don't think so. This Coleman that's at 516, he had that barbecue place there on Springfield Avenue. I think it was opposite Williston Avenue. But I think that he's paying the price now for staying up all night barbecuing, but his legs are not as strong as they could be. But I'm pretty sure that he may have sold it. The business may be continued, but I know he's not in it.

Q: What do you remember about the kinds of music that one heard in black Newark?

Churchman: Well, I had an uncle who was quite a musician in the early 30s, Joe St. John. And he later moved to Georgia. But at that time, they had a Savvoy Ballroom over on Springfield Avenue that many of the jazz greats, in fact, got their start there. And then, of course, Marshall Deuce came along a little later generation cause he was living in the Harrison-Douglas Apartments too on Somerset Street. He became very active in the musicians union, and he was a representative for them. He was quite a sax man. And, of course, they used to have quite a session. They had a place they used to call Skateland, but they turned it into a dance arena afterwards and they used to have the bands there too. But that was back in the early 40s. But they had the old Kenney Club where you got entertainment. And later became a favorite spot for small musical groups. But since I wasn't in and out of too many of those places, I didn't know that much about it. But they, you know, enjoyed good music.

Q: Do you remember any prominent black entertainers coming into the City of Newark at any time? Such as maybe.

Churchman: Well, they used to come down to, there was a theater across from the old Grand. I'm trying to remember the name of it. Cause they used to have.

Q: Was it the Adams at that time?

Churchman: That was the Adams, yeah. And they used to have live entertainment there. And they had all of the big bands. I can remember Etta James coming and singing. In fact, they used

to laugh, and used to say when they had these entertainment, they would take a bus down and empty the theater out and take the children back to school.

Q: Did you say Etta James?

Churchman: Yeah. Etta James I remember practically all the big bands. Lundsford, Basie, they would come and maybe be there two or three days. Cause that was in the early 40s.

Q: Sarah Vaughn and Ella Fitzgerald. Sarah Vaughn was a Newarker.

Churchman: She was a Newarker, yeah.

Q: What about Ella Fitzgerald?

Churchman: Yeah, I've seen her in Newark, but she wasn't a Newarker. Sarah Vaughn, she got her start at Mt. Zion Church singing in the choir. She also, during the war, my mother had a girl she used go to the USO, and she'd meet some of the girls, and Sarah was one of them, and she would sing at the USO show or clubs or what not. She, you know, lived on, I think she lived on Avon Avenue, and she was originally from the Sherman Avenue area.

Q: What do you remember about the Newark Eagles?

Churchman: Oh, I used to swear by all the Newark Eagles. I used to go to the games. The thing that bothered me the most is they used to have open day on Mother's Day. But my mother would always, we'd go to church, and she'd say, I know you want to go to the ballgame. So you go ahead. But I used to go down. And I can remember Mule Souls and Ray Dandridge, all of the ballplayers. I remember when Larry Gilbert was playing with the Newark Eagles. Cause Larry and I finished high school the same year. I met him at an affair at the Court Street Y, we were honoring the athletes that were coming out of the Newark, the black athletes that were coming out

of the different high schools. I was fortunate enough to meet him then. And ironically he graduated with my wife in high school.

Q: What about this, what was this outstanding black pitcher named Satchel Page. Did he ever play with the Newark Eagles?

Churchman: No. But I've seen him pitch against the Eagles. It was Satchel Page, and, of course, that Newcomb that pitched with the Eagles too.

Q: Were there any other black athletic or sports events you attended?

Churchman: Well, my dad took me to quite a number of Joe Lewis fights, bouts. And I was very fortunate, in fact, I even took my wife to the last, the Lewis/Carnes fight that was in Yankee Stadium. We saw that fight which was quite historical. But I didn't see either one of the Smelling fights. But I did, I guess I must have made about eight or nine of the fights. Because at one time, Joe Lewis was fighting bum of the month, you know. So I saw. But most of the fights, his fights I did see, was in the Garden.

Q: In the Garden, was in the Laurel Garden?

Churchman: No, this was in Madison Square Garden.

Q: Madison Square Garden.

Churchman: Now they had a, there was Laurel Garden that quite a number of the younger fighters in Newark. E. Smith was one of them that grew up in Newark. He was from Mama Street. And Ruben Farrell or Benny Deane, all of these Benny Deane and Ruben Farrell I met overseas. But they were all the young fellows who started at the Laurel Garden and made good names for themselves. They had started out in Golden Gloves and then turned professional.

Ruben Farrell I believe he's still alive. I see Benny Deane every once in a while. He was here to a funeral not too long ago.

Q: This is an interesting question. What do you recall regarding the seamy side of black Newark life? Like the girls on the block and.

Churchman: Yeah. Well, I remember Clayton Street very well. I used to come in from Boy Scout meetings and I used to see them ladies on the corner. And I could hear them say, oh, that's Mrs. Churchman's son. [Laughter] But everybody had a healthy respect. The one thing that used to both me the most would be grown men going around panhandling for money. And they didn't care whether you were an adult or a child. They'd try to bum a nickel or a dime from you. But that was, but even then, you know, if you told people no, they went on about their business. But there wasn't any, they didn't wring your arm or anything. It was just upsetting to me to see grown men doing that. I guess that was, that was in the early 30s, a few years after the Depression.

Q: Any black gangsters or mobsters?

Churchman: Well, I think we had our share of them. I won't name any names. But there was one gentleman that was known to be a heavy hit man. He used to push me around in a baby carriage. That was on Barclay Street so. But I think we had our share of strong arm men. Some that were developed into long shoremen who had to work hard and long. Many of the men that worked, you know, they weren't admitted to the union. So they didn't have the fringe benefits. And speaking of long shoremen, I can remember Mrs. Stewart starting a restaurant up on Prince Street, where she dealt with the long shoremen. Meant that she was there, I guess, three or four o'clock in the morning cooking so that the men could shape up. Cause they had a union hall or some kind of hall up there on Prince Street. And they met going to work. She later moved to Avon Avenue and Lyons, and now her son also has a business down there on Bundy Street and White.

Q: How were these people perceived from the Newark community? All of these. The girls who

worked the streets and the gangsters and the beggars. How were these people perceived by the ordinary?

Churchman: Well, I think that they were, it was accepted as just a sort of necessary evil. But I say that because of the limited availability of livelihoods. Of course, you talk about the ladies of the streets. Because that's the oldest profession in captivity and you can't kick it. When I went to Pearl Harbor that was legalized there.

Q: So now part of this question we have talked about before, but I'm going to read the whole thing and you can respond to such parts as you like. What do you recall regarding public education in Newark? How well academically did black students seem to perform? How were they treated by white teachers and students? Were black students involved in intramural sports and/or extracurricular activities? And what black teachers do you recall? Any of that.

Churchman: Well, the one black teacher that I recall, of course, was Grace B. Fenderson. But unfortunately I did not have any in high school at all. And I was extremely proud when I went to Howard and I saw black men and women that were Ph.D.s. But as far as acceptance in the school by fellow students, grammar school acceptance was probably almost normal. In high school I would say it would be below normal. As far as acceptance into other clubs, other activities in the high school, it was below normal. And it might have been because many of us did not have the initiative to go join these, and our parents did not push. I think that as far as the teachers were concerned, that was, might have been a fifty/fifty situation. Some teachers bent over backwards to try to help you. I can look back on some of the teachers that I had and I thought they did an excellent job in trying to bring out the best in me. And I can look at some of the others and apparently could care less. I think that educationwise the level for the City of Newark has dropped. You can't turn around and have forty-five or fifty children in a class. Then, of course, they try to blame the teachers because the children are not learning. Cause she's busy trying to keep order in the class and it creates a problem. I think that I still agree with the years ago when the parents were concerned with the attitudes of children. And as you pointed out, they just

automatically accepted that they would be treated fairly educationally. But they was busy trying to get the youngsters there clean and attentive. But I think that the level of, what the children should be getting and receiving has been reduced. It could well be because of the financial situation that exists. Teachers who at one time would only want to teach in certain areas, and it meant that teachers in the poorer areas came up with people that were less qualified. And, of course, that goes across the board. If you go the Post Office or you go to any other service institution, it seems to me that the banks in our area, we always had the people that were less fit to handle things. They were the ones that were sort of assigned to our area. And I think that we, there's no getting around it, that we need to set certain standards and abide by them. This thing of having social promotions where you have people coming out of school still not able to read. You know, this is really a disservice to the individual as well as to society. But you can't pile fifty people in a classroom and expect them to learn.

Q: Do you think minority kids perform academically on a comparable level to whites during those days or?

Churchman: I think they performed on a level better than they are at this time. That was not maybe one hundred percent, but a good percentage, a much greater percentage than I see now. And, of course, I'm not in the educational field. I'm just going by the different, you know, things that I have run into that I have been able to see. I think it's interesting, this Thirteenth Avenue School here, that was put up by black architects. Every once in a while, I have some of the students in from there, and I'll say do you know that it was black architects that designed that school? They don't know. But this is maybe history that would affect me because I knew them, the men that designed it. But this is the sort of thing that we could look at and look at with pride, you know.

Q: And the next question. What would you consider to be the five most important events or developments that have occurred in Newark during your residence here? For example, like strikes, or elections or riots, major fires, natural disasters, black immigration like any of those things that

you remember as having been particularly noteworthy.

Churchman: Well, of course, unfortunately the foremost was the strike, the riot. And I have certain reservations about that. Because that was really a terrible thing that happened to Newark and to our black community. Because the riots took place in our community. Didn't take place in other places. I think the second most important thing that happened in Newark was the election of Ken Gibson. This was without a doubt a tremendous victory, not only for blacks, but for whites too. Now as far as the other three most important items.

Q: We had a teachers strike some, not too many years ago.

Churchman: Yeah. The teachers strike, I think the young lady that headed the union, Carol Grey.

Q: Carol Grey.

Churchman: Was quite, I thought she did really an outstanding job. And I know that, you know, she was at the point where she was trying to serve two masters. Which is difficult for anyone. But I think she did an admirable job. Really did a sort of a thankless job. But anyway, that be what it may, that was, I think, very important. I think that the other most important thing that happened in Newark to my way of thinking was the passing of my mother in 1974. I am continually impressed with the people who still ask about my mother. In terms that they speak of her and that they remember her from the Trinity Neighborhood House. How she has raised this child or that child. And twenty-two years later to have people speak of her is really, really something to me and to my children. They're quite impressed the people still speaking of her. And I don't mean to be braggadocio. Because I'm not. But it's just with a great deal of pride. She was so concerned about the people that she dealt with. I'm very fortunate in that regard. But I don't want to, I'm going afield of your question.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE THREE

Q: Okay, let's go back to the question about black immigration into Newark.

Churchman: Yes, well I often think of the joke they tell about people being around the train and the conductor said, Newark, and people thought he said New York so they landed in Newark. But I think we've had, originally it was quite an increase in people from Virginia, and then later from Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina and South Carolina. Some people coming in from Mississippi. But I think the bulk of the people here are really from along the eastern seaboard, south of the Mason-Dixon Line. And it was, I think, with a great deal of interest, people came and they were looking to improve themselves and normally carried themselves well.

Q: In what major ways has Newark changed since you first, during your life here? How has Newark changed? For better or for worse?

Churchman: Well, it has to change for the better. It's just that some of the points, some of the things need to be improved. But I think that one of the things that bothers me is the drop in the number of citizens that we have in Newark. One time we had well over four hundred and fifty thousand, and I think now 380. But I think we need to pull together. We need to fortify ourselves and hang in to see that we can do things for the future of our children.

Q: When do you feel black life in Newark reached its highest peak? What was so great about this particular time and when do you feel black life in Newark reached its lowest peak, and what was so bad about this particular time?

Churchman: Well, I think that we reached our highest peak in the late 40s and 50s, people coming back from the service. Having a real shot at doing something. A lot of jobs open up. A lot of avenues. A lot of people they continued war time employment. And, of course, I guess the highest point for Newark, and particularly black Newark, was when Ken Gibson was elected



mayor. I think he was sincere in approaching his office taking the job under very difficult circumstances. Such as the City Council was not necessarily with him most of the time. And he did everything he could. I think the low point without a shadow of a doubt for Newark, for black Newark, was the riots which took place in the 60s which was terrible. It was terrible because the riots all took place in our own area. I can remember some of the older people at the time, who lived on the first floor of public housing, they were laying on the floor fearful that they would shot. Cause, you know, that's a. I think that just the night before the riots started I was out walking my dog, and past Bargain, Springfield Avenue, and it must have been twenty, twenty-five men standing outside. And I didn't know what it was, for somebody born and raised in the city, somebody's supposed to say, hello Churchman or Junior or something. And I went home and I told my mother, I said, you know, something's about to happen around here that's not good. And I don't know whether these people were all from out-of-town or what, but did not look well.

Q: Did you know Mrs. Louise Scott as a person and/or as a business person in Newark?

Churchman: I didn't. You know, I knew her by sight. But I knew and respected her as a business person. Where she had her business originally, I believe, was on Barclay Street. But I did not know her that well. But I did have a lot of respect for her, particularly when she took over the old mansion here.

Q: What do you thing the community's perception of her was? Did you ever visit her home on High Street?

Churchman: No. I never did. I think the vision of her was good. Here was somebody out of the community that was succeeding and doing something with it. And I thought it was tremendous to see her make the purchase of the mansion.

Q: What do you know about the High Street area in which the Krueger-Scott Mansion is located? And did you ever, did you or anyone you know work for any of, wait, I'm sorry. Did you or

anyone you know work for any of the families in the High Street area? Do you want me to read that whole question again. What do you know about the High Street area in which the Krueger-Scott Mansion is located. And did you or anyone you know ever work for any of the families in the High Street area?

Churchman: I didn't know anyone who worked for any of the Kruegers. I did know that in 19, I think it was in 1934, my father had a funeral home across the street there at 602 High Street. And he didn't stay there too long because people said he was on High Street so he was expensive. [Laughter] So he moved from there to Waverly Avenue. But my mother used to tell me that High Street was, when she was a youngster, that the street was nothing but where rich people lived. She would walk along in awe looking at the different residence from time to time. I imagine she was walking back and forth to church, to, from our old church which was at New and High to our home down on Field Heights Avenue.

Q: Did you know about any of the occupants of the mansion who preceded Louise Scott? Did you or anyone you know work at any of the city's breweries?

Churchman: No.

Q: Okay, one last question on this. How would you sum up your experience of living in Newark?

Churchman: Well, I've always told everyone that I've had a terrific childhood. Despite the fact that we had limited places we could swim, I, as I indicated, I received the rank of Eagle Scout in the scout movement. And I had to know how to swim. I had to pass a swimming merit badge. I had to do a lifeguard merit badge. And I had to go the Morris Avenue Bathhouse to be able to go to a pool. Because they, the Y downtown wouldn't accept me. And that was how bad things were. I didn't know any better, I guess, so I was happy and I got along. And people were very, very helpful. In my swimming, I can remember Mr. George Mindheim, who later became one of the owners of Green Taxi Company, helping me. He was quite a swimmer himself. But by and

far, my experience was good. I'm proud of being a Newarker and being born and raised here. I think that a lot of the cohesiveness that exist in family life and in my life, trying to work with my children, my grandchildren, has been part of growing up in the City of Newark. I went in the service I had a very good ability to get along with people. Not that I had to get down on my knees or anything, but I was able to handle myself with any or all groups. So I made out very well. So really I have no complaints having grown up in the City.

Q: May I save the best for the last. Would you give us a history of the funeral business in Newark as you know it. I've been in the Newark area now since 1952, and I've known of some of the other funeral directors or funeral directors who were here and some are no longer here. So give me your perspective on what the funeral business has been like in the City of Newark.

Churchman: Well, I think that there were two funeral homes here, I think a little before my dad. Might have been along around the time that my grandfather was operating. But it was, one funeral home was by the name of Brown.

Q: What year was this, do you remember?

Churchman: I really couldn't tell you. It had to have been in the 20s. I'm sure. And then it was the Courier had a funeral home too. But it wasn't, I don't think it was any relation of Reverend Courier, but it was a different branch. But the what, the first funeral homes I remember was Luke Dancy on West Market and Whitworth. And then it was a Harry, I think I mentioned Harry Brown. Yeah. Harry Brown. Then it was Beckett who had taken over my grandfather's when he moved, but he had quite a successful business going on as I can remember as a youngster. And then Cotton had a funeral home on Wallace Street and West Market. And then it was the Woodeys. And Mr. Woodey had worked for my grandfather too. David D. Woodey. But those were the funeral homes that were in existence in my childhood. And then later, maybe as a young man, opened a place up in north Newark. He's dead now.

Q: Emmett Lewis?

Churchman: Emmett Lewis.

Q: Davney.

Churchman: And then, yes, Davney, Jack Davney. And he opened I think in the late 30s on Norfolk Street. And by the way his wife is still living in the residence up at Park Avenue.

Q: Anita. She's active with the --

Churchman: Urban League. Yes. And they had then Clarence took over Emmett's place I think. I don't know whether Clarence was there first or Emmett. Maybe Clarence was there first.

Q: Clarence, yes.

Churchman: Clarence opened first and then Emmett. And then Clarence moved down to Cape May Courthouse. But then Perry's opened. I think Perry opened in the late 50s.

Q: On Waverly Avenue.

Churchman: Yeah. He bought the place from my father. That was my father's old funeral home. And my father moved to Clinton Avenue. But then, of course, Sally opened, Sally Waite opened his place in the late, in the 40s, late 40s. And he had worked for my father, and the he worked at [?] He had opened across the street from where he is now.

Q: There were two of the Woodey brothers. Coleson and Eldrige.

Churchman: Eldridge. Yeah. Eldridge took over his father's place here on Bloomfield Avenue.

Coleson has always been in Orange.

Q: I see.

Churchman: Now he may have worked there one time with his father. But as far as I can remember he has been in Orange. Coleson opened that place up in Orange, I guess, about 1943.

Q: Well, I want to thank you Mr. Churchman. This has been a real pleasure. I thank you for your time. And I'm sure, you know, you will have contributed greatly to our project down at the Scott-Krueger Mansion. And when we get this all shaped up, certainly we will let you know. And send you an invitation, or I will personally invited you to come to whatever our opening exercise is and again, I just thank you for giving us this time.

Churchman: Well, thank you for being so kind.

END OF INTERVIEW